

India grounds pilot for sending hijack alert by mistake

AFP, New Delhi

India has suspended a pilot for accidentally sending a hijack alert to air traffic control during a domestic flight last month, the aviation authority said.

The AirAsia India plane, flying from the capital New Delhi to Srinagar, suffered a stalled engine and the captain told first officer Ravi Raj to send an emergency code to alert authorities about the situation.

Instead of the appropriate code 7700, Raj transmitted 7500 -- the code for a hijacking -- India's Director General of Civil Aviation said in a statement on Friday.

Such a transmission is considered a major security alert across the world. Precise details of the response from Indian authorities during the incident were not available, but local media reported last month that procedures for handling a hijacking were set in motion.

She confessed

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Along with his wife, two daughters and two brothers, Mozammel talked with Minni for about 10 minutes in presence of law enforcers.

Asked about Mozammel's allegation of torture, Barguna Police Superintendent Maruf Hossain said, "If Minni had anything to say, she could have said it to the magistrate. You can easily understand the worth of her comment. Why did she tell her father about the police torture instead of the magistrate?"

The SP also faulted Mozammel for "creating a scene" before the court on Friday.

Rifat, 25, was hacked to death by a group of men on June 26 in Barguna. A video footage of the daylight murder shows Minni trying in vain to save her husband with her bare hands.

Police have so far arrested 15 suspects including Minni, who was made an accused during the course of the investigation.

Prime accused Sabbir Hossain Nayan, also known as Nayan Bond, was killed in a so-called gunfight with police on July 2 in Barguna.

The case took a different turn after Minni's arrest on July 16 following a 13-hour questioning at Barguna Police Lines.

A Barguna court placed her on a five-day remand the next day.

No lawyer represented her at the time, and her father claimed local lawyers did not take their case because of "influence and threat" by some influential politicians.

Asked, eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said, "It is a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed under article 33 of the constitution and also contrary to the Appellate Division verdict in Bangladesh VS BLAST case."

On her way to the jail after her confessional statement on Friday, Minni tried to say something, but two female cops were seen gagging her.

Mozammel claimed his daughter came to meet him at the jail gate yesterday with support of others. He said Minni was so sick that she could not speak clearly.

Asked if Minni was tortured during remand, he said, "Remand means torture. She cried when we asked whether she was tortured."

Barguna Jail Superintendent Anwar Hossain said a diploma nurse examined her on her arrival at the jail.

"Minni is not ill and she can walk smoothly," he told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, a four-member team from Ain o Salish Kendra have reached Barguna to give legal assistance to Minni, said Abu Ahmed Faijul Kabir, senior coordinator of the rights body. The team includes two lawyers.

Besides, Mahmudul Bari Aslam, secretary of the Barguna Bar Association, agreed to represent her in court where he is expected to move a bail petition today, said Mozammel.

"We went to the chamber of Mahmudul Bari and requested him to represent my daughter. He agreed," he said.

Mahmudul could not be reached for comments over the phone.

Also yesterday, Rifat Farajee, a key suspect, gave confessional statement before Senior Judicial Magistrate Mohammad Sirajul Islam, police said, but did not disclose its content.

[M Jahirul Islam Jewel contributed to this report.]

It's alarming

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observing the situation and the city corporation will work on the basis of the report.

Mentioning that Aedes mosquitoes are born only in clear water, the mayor said there was no alternative to creating awareness. "We've destroyed the sources of Aedes mosquitoes in 33,000 houses in the city in February and taught the owners ways of destroying those. But it's regrettable that we find the same old situation when we revisit the houses."

Asked about the use of ineffective insecticides to control mosquitoes, he said the DSCC used insecticides supplied by the Bangladesh Navy.

"We'll look into whether there's any problem in the medicines."



Dust kicked up by vehicles shroud a huge areas in Postagola yesterday. Work on widening the road there is causing locals and road users to suffer.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Ill motivebehind her remarks

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programme at the White House on Thursday.

Priya also told the president that her land had been grabbed by Muslim fundamentalists and sought his help so that Hindu, Buddhist and Christian people could live in Bangladesh.

She also participated in the Second Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom held at the US Department of State in Washington, DC on July 16-18.

Delegates from 106 countries, including about 40 foreign ministers, attended the meeting at the invitation of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen also took part in the event.

In a media statement yesterday, Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly protested and condemned in the strongest possible terms "all the blatant lies" that Priya told Trump.

"Bangladesh is a beacon of religious freedom and communal harmony, where people of all faiths have been living in peace for ages," it said.

The Bangladesh government would expect that organisers of such a big international event would invite responsible individuals who would objectively contribute to promoting the true spirit and value of religious freedom, read the statement.

The humane attitude and generosity of the Bangladesh government have been commended by the whole world when it decided to temporarily shelter over 1.1 million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals, it added.

Meanwhile, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Earl R Miller, while visiting a Buddhist temple in the capital's Merul Badda on Friday afternoon, appreciated the country's religious harmony.

Miller, who was sworn in as the ambassador on November 13 last year,

shared with reporters his experience of meeting religious leaders from across the country.

"I now have enough perspective after being here for eight months and travelling so widely to recognise that Bangladesh is doing something remarkable," he told journalists.

The US envoy also said, "Everywhere I have gone I have received the same message, be it from an Imam, a priest or someone in the temple, that no country can succeed unless it works together."

He said it was a lesson that his country and the world could learn from.

Contacted over the phone, an official of the US embassy in Dhaka, wishing not to be named, told The Daily Star that he did not know how Priya was selected to meet the US president as a religious persecution survivor.

The US state department had invited eight people from Bangladesh, including two Rohingya representatives, to attend the conference.

The Bangladeshi delegation included people from Muslim, Hindu, Christian and Buddhist communities and government officials to talk about their experience about religious freedom.

Talking to UNB over the phone on Friday, Rana Dashgupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad, said he was not aware how Priya went to the US and reached Trump.

He said she was not among the three members who represented their platform at a ministerial meeting on advancing religious freedom hosted by the US Department of State.

"I've nothing else to say," he said.

'PRIYA TO BE SUE'D'

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said Priya would be sued on sedition charges.

"Priya Saha's allegation was absolutely false. No one will agree with her. A sedition case will be filed against her. The process is underway," he told reporters at the AL president's Dhanmondi office.

BSS reports: Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said Priya must prove her "allegations".

"She will have to prove the allegations she made to the US president, or otherwise stern actions will be taken against her for the baseless, false and fabricated complaints," he told journalists at his Dhanmondi residence.

Asked about the allegations, the home boss said, "I didn't see any such incidents over the last five and a half years. I don't know why she made such false statements to the US president."

"She may have a purpose. We must ask her when and how it happened. Of course, she will give an answer accordingly."

Describing the present situation in the country, he said, "Before the last caretaker government's tenure, Hindu people constituted more than 8 percent of the population. Now it has risen to 10 percent."

"If such incidents had taken place, the government and the people would have known."

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Md Asaduzzaman Mia also termed Priya's complaints on persecution of minorities in the country totally fabricated, baseless and unrealistic, BSS adds.

Kazi Reazul Hoque, former chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, said Priya should be tried for spreading falsehood.

"Bangladesh has been demeaned in the world as she made a false and fabricated allegation to the US president. It is a punishable offence," he said.

Addressing a programme at the Jatiya Press Club, Reazul also called upon the Bangladesh government to conduct an investigation into the matter to bring Priya under the purview of the legal process.

State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury also condemned Priya's statements.

At an event in Dinajpur yesterday, he said she made such remarks for her own personal interests.

He did not elaborate.

Meanwhile, Sampriti Bangladesh, a citizens' platform, has condemned and protested the controversial remarks, said a press statement issued by the platform's Convener Pijush Bandyopadhyay and Member-Secretary Mamun Al Mahtab.

In a press statement, Alliance for Resistance of Terrorism and Communalism, another platform, said what Priya told the US president were lies and tantamount to treason.

Trump says Johnson would do 'great job' as British PM

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump said Friday that Boris Johnson, the frontrunner to be Britain's next prime minister, would do a "great job" in the post after the pair had a telephone conversation.

"I like him," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. "I spoke to him yesterday."

"He is going to do a great job," the Republican president added. "We get along well."

Floods wreak havoc on croplands

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this year.

A senior official of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) said 20 percent of the submerged aush crop might get damaged fully. This would mean the loss of 20,000 tonnes of paddy if the average aush output of last year is considered.

"The plants that are in the tillering stage is unlikely to be damaged, but those in the flowering stage will be lost," the official said.

Matiur Rahman, a farmer of Ghogadaha union in Kurigram, which is one of the worst-hit districts, said, "All of my aush paddy has been ruined by water."

Having only three bighas of farmland, he has to rent land and farm it to make a living.

Matiur planted paddy on five bighas during this aush season with the hope to augment his income after suffering for the low prices of boro, harvested in May-June.

The flood has started receding from his locality but Matiur said nothing would be left. "I was planning to harvest aush in three weeks' time."

His peril does not end here. "All the aman seedlings and standing vegetables were damaged," he said. "The same befell other farmers in

my locality. Many of them lost their stored paddy, too."

Cultivation of aman, the second biggest rice crop after boro, faces setback with 11,000 hectares of its seedbeds having been inundated, said Md Abdul Mueyed, director of field services wing of DAE.

Floods came as a successive shock after growers were trying to recover from low boro prices this year, caused by a good harvest and higher public and private stocks.

"Nothing we had in the field will remain after the flood," said Matiur, who grew vegetables on four decimals of land to meet his family needs.

"This is the worst-ever flood after 1988. There is water everywhere. We are suffering badly," Matiur has taken shelter on an embankment near his residence.

According to DAE, the flood submerged summer vegetables on 10,000 hectares of land until Friday, and none of them may survive after the flood.

A trip to village two unions of Kurigram sadar revealed that all the farmland was flooded, with no crops standing above the water level. Only the remains of dead vegetable plants were visible.

DAE official Mueyed said all aman

seedlings might get destroyed, but there is time to prepare seedbeds newly for aman plantation. "Farmers may have the seeds."

The official said a portion of aush paddy could be saved if water recedes within one or two days. "We will be able to calculate the total financial loss after the flood."

DAE estimates that farmers have planted aush on 11.49 lakh hectares, while it aimed to bring 58.79 lakh hectares under aman cultivation this season.

Aman is harvested in winter.

Farmers have planted summer vegetables on 3.32 lakh hectares this year.

Chhakmal Hossain, a farmer in Pachgachhi Union of Kurigram upazila, who grew painted gourd on two bighas, said all his crop is gone.

The same happened to his neighbour Moazzen Hossain. "I was hoping to make a good profit from the harvest," he said.

CONSUMERS PAYING HIGHER

With farmers and people of affected areas suffering, residents in urban areas, particularly Dhaka, are seeing a sharp rise in the prices of greens.

Green chilli sold at Tk 80 a week ago per kilogram, but the price soared

to as high as Tk 200 in the capital, said Imon Mia, a vegetable retailer at Sankar in Dhanmondi area.

Prices of other vegetables including brinjal, okra, wax gourd, and bitter gourd rose by Tk 10-15 per kilogram, he said. "This is because of flood."

Delwar Hossain Kusum, joint secretary of wholesalers association Karwan Bazar Aratdar Samity, echoed Imon.

According to the Department of Agricultural Marketing, the average prices of green chilli soared by 54 percent to Tk 140 per kg in Dhaka on Thursday from a week ago.

Prices of eggplant, pointed gourd, okra and snake gourd also shot up by 13 to 32 percent during the same period, it says.

DAE Director Mueyed said flood situation has improved in some areas such as Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari, but new areas are getting affected.

To support farmers, DAE has taken an initiative to prepare aman seedbeds on government-owned land for plantation after the flood, he said.

"We are also planning to make 2,500 floating seedbeds in flood-hit areas," he said, adding that seeds of a variety of pulses would be provided to growers.

Mobs beat

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attacked her.

"We are trying to arrest those involved," Badda Police Station SI Masudur told the newspaper. He, quoting the family, said the woman was mentally ill.

Her body was sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Another woman aged around 32 died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday evening, hours after she was beaten up by locals in Savar's Tatlujhora area.

Locals told police that some people found the woman's demeanour suspicious and beat her up around 10:30am, said AFM Sayeed, officer-in-charge of Savar Model Police Station.

Police later rescued her and sent her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. They could not identify her immediately.

In Rasulpur village of Dhaka's Keraniganj, an unidentified young man was killed and another critically injured in mob beating yesterday morning.

Witnesses said locals thought the two youths to be child kidnappers as they were talking to a group of children around 8:30am, reports UNB.

Locals then started beating them up. Police later rescued them and took one of them to Upazila Health Complex another to Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital, said Sub-inspector Chunnu Mia of Keraniganj Model Police Station.

In Moulvibazar, an unidentified man aged about 50 was beaten dead by a mob around 10:00pm at a tea estate, said Arifur Rahman, OC of Kamalganj Police Station.

Police rescued him and sent him to a hospital where doctors declared him dead.

In Narayanganj, an unidentified man aged around 25, was killed by a mob in Mizmizi area of Siddhirganj in the morning.

Locals told police that he was beaten on suspicion of attempting to kidnap a 6-year-old girl around 8:00am.

Police later took him to Khanpur 300-bed Hospital where doctors pronounced him dead.

Three hours after the incident, a 20-year-old woman was beaten up by locals in the same upazila.

Sharmin, wife of Salman Mia of Dhaka's Keraniganj, has been admitted to Khanpur Hospital with critical injuries, said SI Shahidul Islam of Siddhirganj Police Station.

In Lalmonirhat, three policemen trying to save a mentally challenged woman from a mob were injured last night.

Police said the woman was sitting on the railway lines when some people told others that she was a kidnapper and started throwing stones at her.

When SI Zillur Rahman and two constables of Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station went to rescue the woman, the mob attacked them too. Doctors and police said the woman appeared to be mentally challenged.

In Savar's Mughrakanda area, a middle-aged man was injured in mob beating around noon when he was visiting a piece of land he owns in the area, said Sub-inspector Moloy Kumar of Savar Model Police Station.

In Chattogram's Sitakunda, a 45-year-old mentally challenged woman was beaten by a mob.

Rehana Begum of Hathazari was attacked by a mob at Salimpur Bazar around 9:00am.

She was later taken to Sitakunda Police Station where officers recognised her as they had often seen her in the area.

Police said she would be handed over to her family.

In Mymensingh, another mentally challenged woman was severely beaten by a mob in Bhaluka upazila yesterday morning.

Maleka Akter, 35, a mother of two, was walking near her village when she was attacked, said OC Mohammad Mainuddin of Bhaluka Police Station.

She was rescued and taken to Bhaluka Upazila Health Complex. Doctors said she had severe injuries.

In Pabna, a 32-year-old man was beaten in Bonogram Dighipara area of Chatmohar.

Police rescued him when he was being beaten up.

One of the three victims of Friday afternoon's mob beating in Thakurgaon is a 55-year-old mentally challenged woman.

(Our correspondents in Narayanganj, Mymensingh, Pabna, Thakurgaon and a staff correspondent in Chattogram contributed to the report.)

Israel spyware firm can mine data from social media: FT

AFP, Jerusalem

An Israeli spyware firm thought to have hacked WhatsApp in the past denied a report Friday that it had boasted to clients that it can scoop user data from servers run by technology titans.

The Financial Times wrote that NSO Group had "told buyers its technology can surreptitiously scrape all of an individual's data from the servers of Apple, Google, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft, according to people familiar with its sales pitch."